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ABSTRACT

This report is one in a series of papers documenting, analyzing, and interpreting changes in federal educational policy since President Reagan assumed office in January 1981. The focus of this report is the future of educational policy. The root problem examined deals with electoral policies and the apparent apathy of the public. Results of polls on public opinion regarding education from 1975 to 1982 (obtained from Gallup, New York Times, and Washington Post) are presented. Five categories of changes are discussed as well as five preferences about education that were pursued by the Administration (individual competition, institutional competition, performance standards, focus on content, parental choice, and character) and the extent to which these preferences have succeeded in being implemented. Includes 11 references. (SI)

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EDUCATION POLICY AFTER REAGAN — WHAT NEXT?

June 1988

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A publication of the Policy Studies Center of the University Council for Educational Administration, 194 Ruffner Hall, Curry School of Education, University of Virginia.

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Prefatory Note

The UCEA Policy Studies Center has been documenting, analyzing, and interpreting the changes in federal educational policy that have occurred since President Reagan assumed office in January 1981. The results of this continuing study have been disseminated through a series of occasional papers. Other occasional papers issued through the UCEA Policy Studies Center include:

- The Significance and Permanence of Changes in Federal Educational Policy: 1980 - 1988 (January, 1986);
- The Effects of Federal Education Policy Changes on Policy and Program Development in State and Local Education Agencies (March, 1986);
- An Analysis of Public Support for the Educational Policy Preferences of the Reagan Administration (December, 1986);
- The Implications for Educational Research of a Changing Federal Educational Policy (June, 1987);
- Fiscal Policy for Education in the Reagan Administration (May, 1988).

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Introduction

In the March 1988 Educational Researcher, James Guthrie examined why in his opinion, "on a first semester campaign report card, most of today's presidential candidates would get poor grades on education policy" (p. 4). He offered several explanations for the candidates' reluctance to enter the fray: solutions are controversial and impose high risks; the problems are intractable and there is little policy makers can do about them; education is a state function and state reform is working better without national government interference. Guthrie concluded that: "Maybe the root problem with education in electoral politics is not with the candidates, but with the electorate. After all, a leader can only pursue a vision of tomorrow if followers concur that there is something wrong with today" (p. 12).

The Public's Agenda for Education

We can test the conjectured root problem. The 1987 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools focused on the educational policies that have been pursued by the Reagan Administration over the past seven years.

- Do the followers concur that there is something wrong with their local schools today?

  The level of dissatisfaction with schools is not very high. Two-thirds of those who should know schools best (parents rating the schools in their own community) would rank them A or B. Only 9% ranked them below average. Parents like their children's teachers - in the elementary school an incredible 71% rated them A or B; even

at the high school level only 10% rated teachers below average. They even like administrators. Two-thirds (63%) of elementary school parents rated principals A or B.

However, there are interesting pockets of dissatisfaction in the overall picture of satisfaction. When non-parents and parents of private school students were asked to rate local public schools, less than half rated their schools A or B (43%) and 13% rated them below average. The respondents least satisfied with the schools are non-white, younger, poorer, living in central cities - a population that will be increasing markedly over the next twenty years. The differences are quite startling, e.g., residents in small towns rate their schools A or B almost twice as frequently as center city residents (53% to 28%).

- Are schools in general becoming better or worse?

From 1981 to 1987, national ratings of schools have slowly but consistently risen. In 1981, 21% of the general public rated the schools below average; in 1987 that percentage had declined to 13%. In '81, 20% would have rated the schools A or B. By 1987 that had risen to 26%. If the ratings A - F are juxtaposed for the two years, the change is consistent at each grade point:

Grade	1987	1981
A	4	2
B	22	18
C	44	43
D	11	15
F	2	6
Don't Know	17	16

The differences between these percentages and those cited in the preceding question reflect the increasing dissatisfaction that arises as the question is changed from local schools to schools in general. Individuals consistently rate highest the schools they know best.

When respondents were asked directly whether the schools had gotten better or worse during the Reagan years, the national totals showed little improvement, but public school parents (33% to 21%) were more likely to note improvement than decline. When asked about improvement for whom, however, the public was quite certain that the schools are much better for above average students (27% to 11%), modestly better for average students (19% to 14%), and about the same for below average students (20% to 22%).

If the sine qua non for leaders to assert a strong policy stance is a sense on the part of followers that there is something wrong with today, then Bush, Jackson, and Dukakis are probably wise politically to declare themselves as potential "education presidents" and leave the particulars of

the continuing reform movement to those who are not trying to win delegates to the national convention.

A part of the public apathy toward the "crisis in education" may be its perception that reform is already occurring across the country - that the Reagan agenda for reform is working.

- Does the public believe that state reform is already working and will work better without federal interference?

There are some aspects of the reform movement triggered by the Reagan Administration toward which the public has overwhelmingly positive reactions:

(1) Raising standards - However you ask the question, the public has no doubt about the efficacy of reform through standards manipulation. By a 7 to 1 margin, 9 to 1 among non-public school parents, they believe that requiring higher academic achievement will help the quality of the public schools. Even focusing on students from disadvantaged backgrounds, a substantial majority (5 to 3) believe raising standards will encourage rather than discourage their academic achievement.

(2) Competition - By almost equally convincing margins, the public believes President Reagan's contention that greater competition is needed among our schools. By a margin of 70% to 14% they feel that state-by-state and school-by-school comparisons of student achievement should be made public, and that the results of such comparisons would serve as an incentive for local schools to do

better, whether the local schools scored better or worse than comparable schools elsewhere.

(3) Emphasis on the basics - It is hard to frame a question about emphasizing the basics that does not result in 75% of the respondents saying "good idea." Seventy-five to 14% believe that increasing required courses and reducing electives will increase school quality. By a 2 to 1 margin they feel that the basics are not emphasized enough in local elementary schools. Overwhelming percentages would mandate core courses for high school students.

(4) Character education - This is not a hot topic among the several items of the Reagan agenda. If prayer is the issue the public knows where it stands; 68% favor an amendment to the Constitution to allow prayer in the schools. Only 26% would be opposed. But teaching courses on values and ethics in the schools draws modest support. Forty-three percent would favor such courses in schools, another 16% think both schools and parents should be involved, and 36% oppose school involvement. By a margin of 3 to 1, the public believes that subject matter for such courses could be developed that would be acceptable to most of the people in the community.

(5) Devolution - Public opinion does not support President Reagan's enthusiasm for removing the federal government from the business of education. Respondents are split on the issue of increasing or decreasing federal influence, but a majority (51%)

> would either increase or maintain the current level of influence. The closer one moves to the local district, the higher the percentage of respondents choosing equal or increased influence (state influence, 70%; local influence, 81%). The basic policy of devolution is popular and widespread.

If the current presidential aspirants hold the belief that the states are already engaged in educational reform, that it is working, and that this is the states' appropriate role, one could argue with either their perception of the current situation or their strict constructionist view of educational policy. If, however, they were to assert that the public believes these three assertions are true, one would be hard pressed to debate this interpretaion of public opinion. The public does believe that education is in a period of reform, that those reforms were initiated during the Reagan Administration, and that they are working.

To overcome this sense of complacency, (i.e., we have problems but we are doing something about them), would require either a modification in the public's attitude toward how well the reforms are working or an intensification of the canditates' attitudes toward the severity of the problem situation. Guthrie (1988) argued:

> Presidential candidates, even if they perceive education issues as presently having only modest political payoff, could do the United States a great and time-lasting service if they would begin through their campaign statements to explain the connection between an effective system of schooling and the nation's long

run survival and success" (p. 12).

He sees the connection as crucially important to the nation's ability "to compete internationally and provide a high standard of living for its citizens" (p. 12). The economic argument might sell to a limited constituency but is insufficient for as long as the current reforms are making progress - in the public's mind if not in fact. A Nation at Risk (1983) convinced the country with a dual package of hyperbole about the failure of the existing system and an alternative set of problem solving options that were affordable and enactable. That probably will not occur twice in this decade unless the current reforms can be demonstrated to the public to be insufficient.

That seems very unlikely. The reforms advocated by Risk were consistent with President Reagan's policy agenda for education but were, even more importantly, a populist reform agenda for education. Take a look at poll results on public opinion regarding education from 1975-82 (Whitt, Clark, & Astuto, 1986):

- On devolution
  - Do you think the federal government creates more problems than it solves? Creates more, 63%; solves more, 19% (CBS/New York Times, 1981).
  - Which level of government does the best job of dealing with the problems it faces? Federal, 21%; state, 26%; local, 32% (CBS/New York Times, 1981).
  - Do you approve or disapprove of the states taking over some

social programs now run by the federal government? Approve, 75%; disapprove, 21% (ABC/Washington Post, 1982).

- Would the states be more efficient? More, 51%; less, 28% (ABC/Washington Post, 1982).

- On competition
  - Would you like to see students be given national tests so that their educational achievement could be compared with students in other communities? Yes, 75%; no, 16% (Gallup/PDK, 1970).
- On standards
  - Do elementary and secondary school students in this community work too hard? Elementary, 5%; secondary, 3%. Don't work hard enough: elementary, 49%; secondary, 54% (Gallup/PDK, 1975).
  - Should all high school students be required to pass a standard nationwide exam in order to get a high school diploma? Yes, 65%; no, 31% (Gallup/PDK, 1976).
  - Should teachers be required to pass a state board examination to prove their knowledge in the subjects they teach? Yes, 85%; no, 9% (Gallup/PDK, 1979).
- On the basics
  - Do the local public schools give enough attention to the 3R's? Enough, 34%; not enough, 61% (Gallup/PDK, 1980).
  - Do you think schools are concentrating too much, too little or just enough on English and math? Too little, 50%; too much, 5% (ABC/Washington Post, 1981).

- On character
  - Do you favor or oppose an amendment to the Constitution that would permit prayers to be said in the public schools? Favor, 76%; oppose, 18% (CBS/New York Times, 1981).
  - What objectives do not receive enough attention in high school? Developing the student's moral and ethical character, 62% (Gallup/PDK, 1981).
  - Would you favor or oppose instruction in the schools that would deal with values and ethical behavior? Favor, 79%; oppose, 15% (Gallup/PDK, 1975).

The basic elements of the Reagan agenda were in place before Reagan took office and long before A Nation at Risk turned its attention to advocating higher standards, competition, merit pay for teachers, examinations for students and teachers, time-on-task, and an emphasis on the basics. The shifts in educational policy during the eight years of the Reagan Administration are more likely to survive because they reflected rather than modified public preference.

Education Policy Changes During the Reagan Years

Interviews conducted in Washington in 1981 found educationists frustrated by the procedural emphases of the Reagan team. The new Administration wanted to talk about budget reductions, deregulation, decentralization and devolution, disestablishment, and deemphasis, i.e., a simple reduction of the position of education as an item of priority on the federal agenda. Where, lamented the educational association officials,

could one find someone in the Administration to talk with about the substance of education - what's good and right to do for kids? One Washington insider, commenting on this dilemma for association representatives, noted, "If the educationists knew what this Administration would pose as its substantive goals, they'd thank God that they're only interested in procedural items."

Insiders' Views

A similar feeling arises when reading Terrel Bell's reflection that, "We would have changed the course of history in American education if the President had stayed with the issue [education] through the implementation phase of the school reform movement." The NCEE report, as Secretary Bell refers to A Nation at Risk, has had quite enough impact as a direction of reform, and its further implementation under the leadership of Secretary Bennett would, we feel, have exacerbated the most negative outcomes of the reform movement. Paraphrasing the respondent in 1981, "Thank God the President chose to redirect his attention from the implementation phase of the reform movement before he had a full opportunity to change the course of history in American education."

Recently (March 25, 1988), the President rekindled his interest in education sufficiently to visit Oakton High School in Fairfax County, Virginia to talk about education issues. He chose Oakton because it had become a leader "in promoting excellence in the teaching profession" through a merit pay program designed to reward good teachers and weed out those who are incompetent. According to the Washington Post, "Officials

said the White House was looking for a typical county school in selecting Oakton, three-quarters of whose graduates go on to college. Its students include two daughters of Superintendent Robert R. Spillane" (Washington Post, March 25, 1988, p. C-1). Moving quickly from the Post's sarcasm to our own, Secretary Bennett declared Fairfax an example of "how to attract and retain good teachers" (p. C-1), while Union President Mimi Dash said morale throughout the county is "very low" (p. C-5). But Reagan declared, "we've begun to introduce free market principles like incentives and accountability to education just as in other professions" (p. C-5).

Secretary Bell (1988) described the results of the reform movement in words not much more challenging than those of the President:

> Where are we today? ... Nationally, ACT scores have risen 2.2 percent and SAT scores 1.5 percent from 1982 to 1986. The high school graduation rate improved slightly during the years 1982 to 1985 going from 69.7 percent to 70.6 percent.... The nation's failure to recover [all or more of] its losses in education performance has been disappointing to me. But the downward slide in education occurred over a period spanning two decades, and it will require a persistent effort over time to recover. (p. 139)

The Secretary went on to note the evidence of reform being reported by the states as of April 1986:

- Forty-one states raised their high school graduation requirements.
- Thirty-three states had initiated student competency testing.
- Thirty states required teacher competency tests.

- Twenty-four states had initiated career ladder salary programs. All the career ladder programs were mandated and funded by legislative action. (Bell, 1988, pp. 139-140)

He concluded:

> In most of the states in which governors have taken an active role in education, new legislation has been enacted to improve learning [?], decrease dropout rates [?], and raise standards and expectations for students. (p. 140)

The former Secretary is not naive enough to believe that all the news from the reform movement has been good news, but he thinks two factors offer promise for the future:

(1) "Necessity is forcing the American people to recognize that the quality of their educational system has a direct bearing on the nation's economic, political, and social well-being and its influence abroad. Faced with trade deficits, shoddy goods, unemployed (and unemployable) youth ... we realize that we can no longer ignore the link." (p. 141)

(2) "I am convinced that one of the keys to increased productivity in our schools is simply to report student achievement regularly, systematically, and with full candor ... the yield on the public investment in education will most certainly increase if we become completely candid in reporting student test scores, dropout rates, and other measures." (p. 142)

An Outsider's View

We would not describe the achievements of the Reagan Administration in affecting educational policy in the terms employed by the President or his two secretaries of education. We would agree that the Reagan years have been consequential for education and the impact has been both procedural (i.e., the structure of educational policy foci and processes) and substantive.

The procedural dimension offers the signal achievement of the Administration. The Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 (ECIA) reversed the flow of educational policy development that had characterized the previous quarter century. The enthusiasm exhibited by the states in filling the power vacuum left by ECIA probably exceeded the Administration's expectations. Like it or not, the locus of action on educational policy is in the state capitals where it will remain for an indefinite time period.

Transferred to the states along with responsibility for education policy has been the burden of increasing expenditures on education. After 1981 the Administration has been unsuccessful in diminishing the education budget at the federal level, but it has been very successful in diminishing expenditures if adjustments for inflation are taken into account. For example, from 1980-1981 to 1987-1988, when adjusted for inflation, federal expenditures on elementary and secondary education have dropped approximately 12% (Verstegen, 1988).

The substantive achievements can be viewed in two ways. First, the

change in emphases at a semantic level has altered the educational policy dialogue at federal, state, and local levels in education. Second, specific substantive preferences have been advocated by the Administration, e.g., career ladders and merit pay for teachers. The first category includes the changes that, in our opinion, are more important.

1. From equity to excellence - Platitudinous assertions by educationists and politicians aside, these constructs are conflictive in educational policy if the measure of output is the achievement of students at particular grade levels. At Risk scored American schools on the basis of international comparisons. This Administration has altered the priority placed on equity and redirected the concern of the public and policy makers to excellence, standards of performance, and individual competition. Their protestations that such an emphasis will benefit, in the long run, those whose equity is jeopardized should be taken no more seriously than the argument of their liberal predecessors that equity can be achieved with no loss in excellence of individual performance by intellectually gifted and economically advantaged youngsters.

2. From needs and access to ability, selectivity, and minimum entrance standards - Is it more popular currently to raise program entrance requirements for teachers than to recruit more minority candidates into teaching? Have institutions of higher education and state legislatures adopted legislation supporting urban teacher corps and minority fellowships or passed laws requiring competency testing for teachers? Again, the policy choices are not exclusive but they are

conflictive. Most political leaders would prefer currently to be advocating literacy passports than social promotion.

3. From social and welfare concerns to economic and productivity concerns - Whether the spokesperson is a policy analyst (Guthrie), a politician-educationist (Bell), a foundation (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy), or the President, or a Presidential Commission (NCEE), the essential link between education and the economic well-being of the country has assumed predominance as a justification for the priority to be given to education. The causal chain, that is argued by those who assert the linkage, eventually ends up claiming benefits that will address social and welfare concerns. But no war on poverty is likely to capture the imagination of the public in this decade stacked up against a war on the trade deficit.

4. From the common school and cooperation to parental choice and institutional competition - Who wants to rise up to argue that there can be no excellence in education or any other walk of life without cooperation and a feeling of espirit de corps within schools and colleges? Who wants to argue that we are jeopardizing the common school that led to America's greatness in education with discussions of vouchers and tax credits? Not many policy makers or educationists. The President, however, asserted without serious challenge in the 1984 State of the Union Address:

> Just as more incentives are needed within our schools, greater competition is needed among our schools. Without standards and competition there can be no champions, no records broken, no

excellence - in education or any other walk of life.

Try standing up right after that remark and saying to a group of citizens or a state legislative committee, "You know, the President's dead wrong about that argument."

5. From diffusion of innovations to exhortation, standards, and information sharing - Just as the federal government had begun to mount a sophisticated support system for school improvement activities, the 1980s occurred. Most of the federal infrastructure supporting school improvement has been dismantled. Almost unbelievable efforts by interested educationists, lobbyists, and a few Congressional sympathizers have saved the life of the National Diffusion Network and the Regional Educational Laboratories. The Administration, in contrast, has a parallel system of school improvement in place, i.e., What Works, the bully pulpit, the Wall Chart, First Lessons, Schools Without Drugs, and support for the myriad of standards of performance adopted at state and local levels.

The Administration has been eminently successful in modifying the terms in which educational policy options are addressed. The new lexicon of terms for talking about education was in place by 1982 and has subsequently spread across the country. This leads to the second set of substantive achievements, i.e., the extent to which the substantive preferences about education held by the Administration have been advanced over the past eight years. These preferences have been relatively constant:

1. Individual Competition, i.e., recognizing excellence to stimulate

excellence;

2. Institutional Competition, i.e., breaking the monopoly of the public school to stimulate excellent performance and publicizing varying levels of achievement among schools, school systems, and states;
3. Performance Standards, i.e., increasing minimum standards for teachers and students to increase achievement;
4. Focus on Content, i.e., emphasis on basics to ensure performance in critical instructional areas;
5. Parental Choice, i.e., parental control over what, where, and how their children learn;
6. Character, i.e., strengthening traditional values in schools.

Success in fostering these preferences has been variable. The Administration has had no difficulty in pushing performance standards. Education in the U.S. has never seen a proliferation of minimum standards to match those adopted by state legislatures, local schools, and colleges and universities over the past four to five years. The Department of Education (ED) has pushed institutional competition successfully through its cross-state comparisons of educational achievement, and has stimulated programs of school and state comparisons among legislatures and through the Council of Chief State School Officers. The school recognition programs of ED have been met with enthusiasm from local school administrators and policy makers. ED has initiated programs of academic achievement for students to stimulate individual competition in schools, but its greatest

success has been the revival of interest in various forms of merit pay for teachers - the most popular being career ladder incentive programs. As noted earlier nearly half the states have adopted mandatory legislation on career ladders. The focus on content has gained ground chiefly through state and local requirements for the completion of more coursework in basic subjects and the reduction of elective options for students. Parental choice of schools has been proposed by the Administration in various forms at the federal level but has gained more ground in the variety of local options in public education undertaken as alternative schools, magnet schools, and open enrollment plans. Parental choice has also been fostered through legislative action in several states, e.g., Arizona, Colorado, Minnesota. Character education was emphasized by Secretary Bennett in awards from the Secretary's Discretionary Fund beginning in 1986, but interest in this theme has been modest.

How could the Administration's success in the educational policy arena since 1980 be summed up? It has overachieved the efforts and emphasis it placed on education because its preferences had populist appeal. The policy agenda was turned inside out to a concentration on excellence, selectivity and minimum standards, economic and productivity concerns, competition and choice, and exhortation. The policy preferences showed marked gains in individual competition, institutional competition, performance standards, an emphasis on the basics, and parental choice. Most significantly, the policy process was altered basically by transferring responsibility for educational policy formulation from

Washington to the state capitals. Simultaneously, the burden of funding education was shifted from both the federal and local levels to the states.

The Enduring Quality of the Changes

The tenor of this paper is about to change from interpretation of past occurrences, which are surely open to argument, to predictions which, we simply concede, are imponderable but worth pondering.

To reduce quickly uncertainty about our position, we would guess that the current pattern or direction of educational policy will persist for another ten to twenty years, whoever or whatever party occupies the White House. We think this is true for several reasons:

- The effort to reduce the national debt will plague proposed expansion of social service programs for the remainder of this century. Education is not and will not be first in line for breakthroughs against debt reduction.
- State political leaders have responded to their broadened and strengthened position in educational policy development with enthusiasm and vigor. They face difficult budget decisions in the years ahead, but those difficulties are no greater than those confronting Washington.
- The integral connection between economic development and education may be asserted to be a national priority but it plays out just as well in the state capitals as in the Nation's Capitol. Equity concerns are a different matter. Many states and localities have had no interest in furthering a national commitment to equity. None

argue against prosperity.

- The dissatisfaction with the educational system essentially as it stands rests primarily with the powerless - the poor, minorities, the young. Social and welfare concerns are less powerful in Washington today than at any time since the 1920s.
- Public opinion among the more powerful is generally supportive of the schools, enthusiastic about the substantive positions of reform pushed in the Reagan Administration, distrustful of the efficacy of federal programs in education, pleased by the energy exhibited by the states, and unwilling to increase taxes.

The new administration's policies will be guided by the party's platform. An example of an early platform drafting effort is the Democratic teleconference. Discussions about education at this teleconference focused on increased funding for Chapter 1, the new GI bill, and a federal tuition savings plan. However, fiscal restraint and governmental efficiency were highlighted by Governor Romer of Colorado:

> The party needs to send a strong message that it's not just a matter of putting more money into the programs; it's a matter of reforming the programs so that we really do deliver an effective service. (Goldberg, June 8, 1988, p. 5)

The Republican conference supported continuation of the Reagan Administration's education policy agenda. Bennett reported:

> We have, I think, helped change the terms of the national debate on education ... We can do more to see to it that government

> policies in general focus on what is fundamental, on 'what works.' ... [The party should] seize the initiative, and advance a vigorous social and political agenda based on time-honored values. (Goldberg, June 8, 1988, p. 5)

These policy perspectives are predictable. The important task for educationists and policy makers is to identify policy possibilities. Those who want to propose policy alternatives in education need to consider the contextual features that support the status quo.

At the Federal Level

The windows of opportunity for major educational policy changes at the federal level are narrow. This might open up some possibilities for educational R&D. President Nixon, hardly an education president, seized on support for the National Institute of Education as a low cost way of demonstrating visibly his interest in the field. With modest funds available and with school improvement and regulatory programs centered in the state capitals, a new education president could attract attention with appropriation increases of $50-$100 million for R&D.

Capitol Hill is still capable of responding to low-cost, targeted problems, e.g., scholarship or fellowship assistance to attract minority enrollment back into programs of teacher preparation or, as has recently been proposed, short-term support for national teacher certification. Further evidence of Congressional support is the Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988 (H.R. 5). This legislation authorized or extended education programs, including

Chapters 1 and 2, magnet schools, bilingual education, impact aid, adult education, and the math/science program. Additionally, programs were authorized for Dropout Prevention and Basic Skills Improvement and Workplace Literacy Partnership Grants.

Without a concerted effort to continue to retain national support, even the old line programs of vocational and special education will have a tendency to bleed away into the block grant. The point is not that they, or the existence of ED, are under immediate threat but that the flow of educational policy initiative is away from Washington. What will happen is best predicted by what is happening.

The only current crisis in education that seems to have both a national scope and a demand for assistance beyond the ability of individual states was highlighted by the Trustees of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in its report An Imperiled Generation - Saving Urban Schools. This crisis is clear and present, requires no inferential connection across variables, e.g., education and economic development. On the other hand, it is a costly venture into a problem that seems to many to be intractable and involves directly the poor and minority groups. But it represents a possibility.

The new secretary of education will find at her/his disposal a pulpit taller and larger in scope than that presented to Secretary Hufstedler in 1980. The use of the office of the secretary as an advocate of educational reform will only be lost through disuse.

At the State Level

The volatile arena of educational policy development in the 1990s should lie in the governors' offices and the state houses. The first flurry of state activity has been exciting and predictable. Financial support for education by the states has risen markedly. The priorities in educational policy were drawn chiefly from the federal agenda, i.e., school assessment, career ladders, teacher competency testing, increased high school graduation and college admissions requirements, more "basic" courses required, disciplinary codes, and extended school days and year. Dissatisfaction with the relatively narrow set of options set in place by state reform initiatives has given rise to a call for second wave reforms. These, assuredly, would require more profound changes in the teaching-learning processes at the school level.

The second wave will be much more difficult for the states than the first. Only a few states as yet have ventured into support for school improvement initiatives that encourage, stimulate, and support change in local education agencies. As the federal government discovered, such policy thrusts are expensive, introduce problematic preferences, are based on unclear technologies, and are difficult to evaluate. However, lighthouse states, e.g., New York and California, have long histories of such involvement and a few other states are now accumulating experience as they attempt to foster more fundamental educational reforms.

Of course, state policy makers in education are headed for rough days. The cost of current reform efforts is above initial expectations and will

rise further as the states try to mount new programs. Second wave reform efforts will be more controversial and require more change in local education agencies if they are to be successful. Special interest groups (the poor, minorities, women) that have lost influence at the national level will seek redress in the state capitals. Increased demands for assistance will coincide with substantial increases in the population of the poor and minorities and less tax leeway with which to operate. National professional associations will gear up to fight more battles state-by-state as it becomes evident that the major battlefield is not in the District of Columbia. The mettle of the state educational policy makers has yet to be tested. What the states are unable or unwilling to do will set the agenda for a revival of interest in the federal role in educational policy some ten to fifteen years from now.

The Liberal Dilemma

Liberals at the federal and state levels face the same difficulty in education that confronts them in other social process fields. Their territory has been preempted by a successful conservative administration. In educational policy development there seem to be obvious holes that have been created by the changes of the past eight years. Foremost among these is inattention to equity concerns across-the-board, the poor, minorities, women, the handicapped. But the counter-argument of the Administration has worked. A majority of the public believes that raising standards and expectations will benefit all segments of the population. Most liberals still believe that there are national concerns in education that transcend

the ability and willingness of states and communities to act. That opinion is not shared by the public. There is substantial evidence that the school improvement process can be facilitated directly at federal and state levels and that exhortation and information sharing are not substitutes for more comprehensive strategies. Again, the public either disagrees or is apathetic. Institutional and individual competition are, at best, problematic routes to educational and organizational improvement. Standards manipulation is certain to create massive push-out and dropout problems. Merit pay for teachers will work no better in education than it has in other organizational settings where its failures are documented thoroughly. But all these policies are supported overwhelmingly by the public.

When President Reagan and Secretary Bennett carry their message on education to the American people, the people listen!

Mounting a counter-agenda for educational policy in 1988 is unlikely to be successful. Educationists and policy makers concerned about education must establish a need for their message before mounting proposed policy changes or interventions at any level of government. The past eight years have been consensus building years in educational policy. And the consensus is strong, i.e: schools need to emphasize excellence; our educational system has problems but if we have the will we can overcome them at the local and state levels; our chief problem is underachievement; the root of that problem is that we have expected and required too little of our teachers and students.

If we continue down this path of "bootstrapping" excellence, we will run into massive problems by the year 2000. Our urban schools will be disaster areas. The fastest growing segment of our population will be least well served by our public schools. The American common school experience will be shattered by flight to independent schools that can offer more satisfactory educational experiences for the affluent. The flow of new knowledge into, and experimentation in, America's schools will be replaced by an effort to respond to the pressure of higher scores on achievement tests. The morale of teachers will continue its current decline and we will confront a teaching force diminishing in quality and in representation from the expanding underclass.

The point of portraying this dismal future is not to predict that it will happen but that it could. No policy agenda for education, liberal or conservative, is adequate to sustain our schools. The currently dominant agenda is too narrow, too trival to meet the country's needs. The apparent consensus around the Reagan agenda is dangerous to the health of our schools. The antidote is the establishment of the need for a broader agenda of reform and the injection of alternative policy options that will require federal as well as state and local action; that will argue equity for its own sake without linking it to economic advantage; that will challenge simplism in the design of school improvement strategies; that will celebrate the common school and open access as well as institutional diversity and individual selectivity.

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